



The Safety Corner

From the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned
August 2006



Electrical Safety - UPDATE

This UPDATE of the Safety Corner contains additional material on last week's topic, electrical safety, from two recent mishaps in OIF.



From the Director: Electrical Safety - UPDATE!!

As the Safety Corner hit the streets last week, we received reports of electrical fires from the 3rd MAW DOSS (FWD), Col Dan McDade. In two separate electrical fires aboard Al Asad, quick actions of Marines limited the extent of damage caused by the fires. MSgt Kenneth Ford prevented the spread of fire started by a faulty light, and in a separate incident, three MACG Marines stopped the spread of a fire started by overheating transformers. Actions like these prevent loss of equipment, injury or loss of life that can be the result of electrical fire. *See next page for details.*

I am currently deployed to Iraq to gain a current perspective on the MEFs operations. I have talked to many leaders and Marines, and tend to believe that electrical overheating/fires and shocking issues are more common place than you would think. The rugged operating environment of OIF means that Marines in some cases occupy 'field expedient' workspaces not previously wired for their current use. Time and use also take their toll on office equipment, electrical cords and other potential sources of electrical hazards. These hazards pose a serious threat to Marines and equipment, and emphasis on safety is equally or even more important in combat than in peacetime: A Marine injured or killed in a mishap is a loss to the unit when the unit can least afford it. Specifically I have discussed overheating circuits with folks from Fallujah and TQ. All have the same basic scenario of too many electrical items plugged into a power strip or improperly wired circuits which has then overheated. The lesson or really my observation is that as the bases in Iraq become more like home we tend to buy coffee pots, TVs, refrigerators, computers, etc., that we are accustomed to at home and at the office, but the wiring system here is just not as robust as we have stateside. As leaders we need to take time out to really look at how the office and living spaces are configured for the current electrical load. In some instances the ad hoc wiring system has caused fires and we have relied upon the quick thinking and responsiveness of our Marines to mitigate the damage. As leaders we need to ensure we do not continue to rely on the quick action after the event. Let's get in front of the problems that we can fix on base now and save the resourceful energies of our Marines for engaging the insurgents.

MCCLL Director recommendation: Leaders need to work closely with their safety officers to inspect office spaces and correct safety hazards immediately. Electrical hazards pose a serious threat which needs to be addressed at all levels in order to reduce the loss of equipment, injury or loss of life that can be the result of electrical fire.

I look forward to your lessons and observations on safety as well as comments on my observations and recommendation on how to increase our readiness for the long war.

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The Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned is working closely with the Safety Division of HQMC to bring safety to the forefront. We need your help. We need you to register on our search enabled website at www.mccll.usmc.mil. Registering will allow you to enter your own safety lessons, briefs, photos, TTPs, and SOPs into our system. By doing so you are passing this information along to Marines and other allied forces around the world. You will also have access to safety information submitted by your peers. We would also like to identify safety performers; so please send us write-ups and photos of you and your safety-conscious Marines..



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From Mr. Miles Bowan, Tactical Safety Specialist, Al Asad Air Base

Electrical fires on board Al Asad have been and will be a serious issue of concern. In fact, there have been MULTIPLE electrical fires just within the last week.

One of the most recent of these took place in one of the "self help" constructed office spaces in Bldg 106 (attached pictures).

The fire was caused by the overheating of a ballast in the overhead lighting mounted on the plywood ceiling. Within seconds the fire spread from the ceiling to the floor, and the surrounding desk tops, as the plastic on the light began to melt. Luckily the fire was quickly observed and extinguished. However, without the quick response of Master Sergeant Ford, this could have quickly turned into a disaster.



To top that off, not even three days later we had a fire in one of the "Presidio" cans that was caused by a transformer left plugged in and unattended while the individual was on leave. Again, quick thinking from three MACG Marines saved the day with fire extinguishers and kept the fire from spreading.

We need all supervisors and safety representatives to take a few minutes out of each week to walk their spaces, identify electrical hazards, and then report them.

Some of the more common things to look for are:

- black or darkened wires
- dead end or exposed wires
- burn marks on lighting equipment
- exposed power boxes
- overheated wires
- "daisy chains" for surge protectors or extension cords.



These inspections should include both working and living spaces.

Everyone's support is needed on this - please make it happen. If you have any questions on what to look for, or how to report what you find, contact the Director of Safety and Standards Office (DOSS) at 3411-133 or email

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